United Nations

Press Release

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Iran calls for help from international community to deal with 1 million Iraqi refugees crossing its border.

- International Committee of Red Cross mobilizes resources to provide shelter, food and medical care for about 200,000 Kurdish refugees in northern Iraq.

- Commission begins review of financial and development issues related to activities of transnational corporations.

- Twenty-nine countries pledge about $17 million in cash and kind for regional institutions and 1991 work programme of Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

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The Government of Iran has informed the United Nations that as of last Monday, more than 771,000 Iraqi refugees have crossed over the border, and the numbers were increasing steadily, with over 1 million expected by the end of this week.

In a letter to the Secretary-General, dated 8 April, Iranian Ambassador Kamal Kharrazi described the situation as "desperate". He said his Government was keeping the borders open and had nearly quadrupled the emergency budget to deal with the crisis from over $14 million to over $57 million. He called on the international community for help, saying the problem was so "tremendous" that the host country alone would not be able to cope with the speed of the influx and the provision of decent emergency living condition for such large number of people.

Meanwhile, Iraq has informed the United Nations of its decision to issue a "pardon" to the Kurds, and has described last Friday's Security Council resolution, which condemns Iraq for the repression of its civilian population and calling for humanitarian assistance, as "biased and full of double standards". In a letter to the Secretary-General and the President of the Council, dated 8 April, Iraqi Ambassador Abdul Amir Al-Anbari said it was a

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paradox that the Council should listen to Turkey and Iran on the situation of the Kurds, while both countries refused to recognize the rights of the Kurdish population.

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The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has informed the United Nations that it is mobilizing the resources needed to provide shelter, food and medical care for about 200,000 Kurdish refugees in northern Iraq.

The Committee said that as soon as large numbers of Kurdish refugees started arriving in the area, it had -- in cooperation with the Iranian Red Crescent -- sent in consignments of tents, food and medicines. It said other supplies, already stocked in Iran, on the border between Iraq and Syria, and in Cyprus, were being transferred to the region and would initially provide shelter for 120,000 refugees.

The ICRC said it had asked about 20 national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies for help in setting up an airlift between Europe and northern Iran; transport aircraft were currently taking in blankets, food, clothing and medicines.

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Increasing the transfer of financial resources and technology to developing countries was one of the topics discussed today, as the Commission on Transnational Corporations began its seventeenth session in New York. The Commission also reviewed competition in world markets and the volume and direction of foreign direct investment flows.

In an opening statement, the newly elected Commission Chairman, Jose Maria Borbon (Costa Rica), said the Commission was an ideal forum to work out formulas for fair negotiations between developing countries and transnational corporations. It must also consider the ramifications of the debt problems, parameters to stimulate foreign investment, and the relationship between transnational corporations and the environment.

The United Nations Director-General for Development and International Economic Cooperation, Antoine Blanca, told the Commission the developing countries faced a number of challenges, including large negative transfers due to debt-servicing. The role of transnational corporations in the development of human resources and of entrepreneurship should be important subjects of discussion. The Executive Director of the United Nations Centre on Transnational Corporations, Peter Hansen, described recent trends in the flow of foreign direct investment. He cautioned that moves towards "globalization" largely reflected international investment between corporations in the "triad" of the United States, Japan and the European Community. The majority of investment that went to developing countries was centred in only 10 nations.

The Commission will be assisted during its eight-day session by a panel of 12 expert advisers.

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Twenty-nine countries have pledged some $17 million in cash and kind for regional institutions in India, Indonesia and Japan, and the work programme of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) for this year.

The pledges were made at ESCAP's forty-seventh session in Seoul, during which ESCAP also accepted China's offer to host its 1992 session in Bejing. The decision is subject to the approval of the Economic and Social Council and endorsement by the General Assembly.

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